



# *CITY COUNCIL*

## ***Work Session***

### **Meeting Report Monday, June 18, 2012**

**Council Members Attending:** F. Acosta, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, R. Corcoran, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

**Others Attending:** L. Kelleher, T. Butler, L. Agudo, R. Natale, E. Lloyd

Mr. Acosta called the Work Session to order at approximately 7:05 pm.

#### **Reading Phillies Lease Agreement**

Craig Stein, owner of the Reading Phillies, stated that since he became the owner of the Reading Phillies franchise in 1986 he has had a tremendous partnership and relationship with the City. He stated that historically, he and the City have also shared the same vision to keep ticket prices affordable, provide free parking and reinvest in the facility.

Mr. Stein explained that this 10 year loan was taken to modernize the facility. Originally the State was to cover 50% of the cost and the Phillies and City were to cover 25% each. He explained that there is a balloon payment due in 2015. He stated that Fulton Bank offered an amortized loan which would reduce the interest rate from 5.75% to 4.8%. This loan has a fixed interest rate for the first five years then a variable rate between 4 and 12% beginning in the sixth year. He explained that the Reading Phillies must cover any increase in the interest rate.

Mr. Stein explained that the lease payment is currently \$22,000 annually; however escalators of \$500 per year go into effect beginning in 2018. He stated that this lower than normal lease payment was negotiated because the Reading Phillies agreed to take on more responsibility for maintenance and utility bills, and investment into the City-owned facility. He noted that the most recent improvements included upgrades to various components that the City should be responsible for.

Mr. Acosta announced the need for the remainder of this discussion to be held in executive session as per Sunshine Act Section 708 a.4 regarding contracts of leased property. The executive session concluded at 7:43 pm and the work session was reconvened.

### **Citizens United Resolution**

Pastor Opalinski and Ramona Turpin asked Council to consider adding a resolution to the June 25<sup>th</sup> agenda to support the Citizens United movement regarding the Move to Amend campaign to call for an amendment to the Constitution to abolish corporate personhood and return our elections to the citizens of the United States and reclaim our right to self-governance.

Pastor Opalinski explained the difference between corporations and humans in life, scope and influence. He expressed the belief that the Supreme Court's decision provides corporations with undue power which minimizes the empowerments of individual voters.

Ms. Turpin explained that this is a nationwide movement. She described the impact of the resolution if adopted.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz applauded the group for bringing this issue forward. She expressed the belief that this is a good first step but noted that many other follow up actions will be needed.

Ms. Reed agreed and noted that in addition to corporations, the amounts an individual can contribute to political campaigns should also be reduced. She also suggested that the group include focus on local elections and follow the local political money trails.

Mr. Sterner agreed that the problem goes farther than corporations.

Mr. Acosta agreed to move this resolution onto the June 25<sup>th</sup> agenda. He also noted the need to change the apathy of voters and the need to educate voters. He also suggested changes to Political Action Committee (PAC) regulations.

### **Quality of Life (QoL) Ticketing Program**

Mr. Agudo and Mr. Natale distributed their recommendations for modifications to the QoL Program and presented a Power Point showing their observations from a review of the program which began in February 2011.

Mr. Agudo stated that the program was initiated to make Reading a cleaner City and to encourage property owners to comply with the City's Property Maintenance regulations. He noted that of the 23 violations included in the program the top six violation issues are for rubbish/trash related violations, high grass/weeds and use of indoor furniture outdoors; 27%

for high grass/weeds and 27% accumulation of rubbish. He noted that the majority of the violations are issued at rental properties; 789 owner occupied properties received 1908 tickets and 1549 rentals received 4047 tickets. "Before and After" photos were displayed which show that the program works to achieve compliance. By Council District, District 1 received the lowest number of tickets totaling 1747 tickets and District 2 received the most tickets totaling 5068.

Mr. Agudo made the following recommendations to improve the QoL Program as follows:

- Broader bilingual educational campaign
- Use of a \$0 charge for the first violation at a property followed by information on the QoL program
- Implementing a protocol for collection of delinquent tickets
- Differentiate penalties for severe and minor infractions
- Increase the number of staff members who hear appeals or use an independent hearing officer
- Implement a 3 day grace period between repeat tickets

Mr. Waltman stated that it is good to see that the program has been reviewed and has evolved. He noted the need for the City to focus its resources on a block by block basis. He suggested starting a Clean and Lien program that would help the City recover the cost of work orders to resolve issues ignored by the property's owner.

Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that the \$0 ticket warning will not correct the problem or engage the property owner.

Mr. Sterner stated that the City began the QoL program using a \$0 approach and a strong educational campaign. He noted that the education program occurred on more than one occasion. He questioned how many times the City should spend money to keep reminding property owners about regulations.

Mr. Marmarou expressed the belief that the program effectively drives compliance. He noted that after receiving a speeding ticket the average driver is more cautious about how he drives. He stated that the QoL program will operate in the same way.

Mr. Corcoran, noting the comparison between the number of tickets issued to owner occupied and rental properties, stated that the majority of the problems at rental properties are the fault of the tenant, not the property owner. He stated that most times the landlord does not receive the ticket by mail until the late fee is applied. He suggested lengthening the time period before the late fee goes into effect.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with ongoing education due to the transiency of City

residents. She agreed that the program is improving the appearance of properties. She noted the need for the City to comply with the regulations it sets for property owners. She noted the unacceptable appearance of the Lindbergh Viaduct.

Ms. Reed agreed, noting that the City should take a leadership role in property management. She also noted the disparity in receiving a \$25 QoL ticket for trash/rubbish set out when a permanent dumpster located at 4<sup>th</sup> and Penn Streets can be overflowing and leaching without anyone taking notice. She agreed with Mr. Agudo's recommendation to revise the fines based on the severity of the violation.

Mr. Acosta agreed with the need for the City to be a model of responsibility with property maintenance.

Mr. Agudo reported that Property Maintenance staff will be performing community projects during non-work hours to show their support for the community. He stated that they will begin on Penn Street. Ms. Reed and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz took issue with volunteer work on Penn Street unless it is coordinated with the volunteer work that is already performed on Penn Street. They described the various projects the volunteer group has taken on over the past year. They suggested selecting another area that is currently uncared for.

### **Other Matters**

Mr. Waltman noted the need for the City to take a stance on the new gas meters installed by UGI. He stated that the meters are unsightly and become a hazard in areas without generous setbacks. Articles regarding the gas meters were distributed.

Mr. Acosta noted the number of yard sales and sidewalk sales that occur in the downtown area on Saturdays. Mr. Natale asked Mr. Acosta to provide the approximate locations as Property Maintenance inspectors now work Saturday hours. The group discussed various illegal activities that occur during times when City Hall is not open.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked the Police Department for their attention to the various criminal activities that occurred in East Reading over the past weekend.

### **Council Staff Report**

The Council Staff Report is attached to the agenda.

As no other business was brought to the table the meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*